



SCHOOL CLIMATE DEFINITIONS IN OTHER STATES

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ISSUE

Provide other states' statutory definitions of "school climate" and their methods for measuring school climate.

SUMMARY

"School climate" generally refers to the social and educational environment at a school and whether it creates a positive setting for learning, academic achievement, and student growth. It can also be tied to anti-bullying efforts. For purposes of this report, we include search results for "school environment" and "safe and supportive schools" since they have meanings similar to school climate.

To provide perspective, we include the definition of school climate, which the [National School Climate Council](#) (NSCC) issued as part of its national school climate standards. (The NSCC is a non-partisan council created by the National School Climate Center and the Education Commission of the States.)

For comparison purposes, this report includes Connecticut's definition of school climate along with those from Massachusetts, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Each of the other jurisdictions uses the term in different contexts. One is limited to data collection in a pilot project. The other two are for specific programs, but only one of those is specifically about safe schools.

In a separate table, we summarize how three states (California, Illinois, and Massachusetts) measure school climate. The National School Climate Center notes that there is not a national consensus on what aspects of school climate are essential to assess or measure, but it suggests that any assessment should address the following four areas: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the external environment.

DEFINITIONS

The NSCC defines school climate as:

based on the patterns of people's experiences of school life; it reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures that comprise school life.

A Westlaw search of state statutes for school climate, school environment, and safe and supportive schools produced the results shown below in Table 1.

In Connecticut law, the definition is used to address bullying and school violence. Each school's required safe school climate plan must include a number of statutory criteria that address, among other things, reporting and investigating bullying complaints.

Each of the other jurisdictions included here use the term in different contexts. In the District of Columbia, for example, it is used for collecting data on school climate in a pilot project at select schools beginning this year. In Massachusetts, it is used in the safe and supportive schools program which is optional for school districts. It is a local decision to opt in. Finally, in West Virginia, the term is used as part of the description of high quality schools that feature decision-making at the local school level. It is part of a school leadership initiative.

Table 1: Statutory Definitions and Uses of School Climate and Safe and Supportive Schools

State	Definition and Uses
Connecticut	School climate means the quality and character of school life with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults (CGS § 10-222d).
District of Columbia	School climate consists of three domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• engagement, including cultural and linguistic competence, relationships, and participation;• safety, including emotional safety, physical safety, bullying and cyberbullying, substance use, and emergency readiness and management; and• environment, including physical environment, instructional environment, physical health, mental health, and discipline (DC Code § 38-2602 (b)(27)(E)).

Table 1 (continued)

State	Definition and Uses
Massachusetts	<p>Safe and supportive schools mean schools that foster a safe, positive, healthy and inclusive whole-school learning environment that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enables students to develop positive relationships with adults and peers, regulate their emotions and behavior, achieve academic and non-academic success in school, and maintain physical and psychological health and well-being; and • integrates services and aligns initiatives that promote students' behavioral health (including social and emotional learning), bullying prevention, trauma sensitivity, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, children's mental health, foster care and homeless youth education, inclusion of students with disabilities, positive behavioral approaches that reduce suspensions and expulsions, and other similar initiatives (M.G.L. 69 § 1P).
West Virginia	<p>School climate reflects strong leadership that develops shared beliefs and values among the staff, high expectations for all, and a safe, orderly, and engaging environment. A key concept in developing good school leadership and then holding schools accountable for student performance is that they have the authority, resources, and flexibility to affect the outcome (W.V.C. § 18-2-36).</p>

MEASURES AND MEASUREMENT METHODS

Three states and the District of Columbia have laws that specify what measures to use or consider when reviewing the climate of a school or a school district as shown in Table 2.

There is no national consensus on what aspects of school climate are essential to assess or measure. As the information gathered here reflects different states use the measurements in a variety of contexts. For example, California's measure of school climate is one part of a much larger accountability plan that boards of education must adopt. In the District of Columbia, the surveys on school climate are part of a pilot program and not all schools are required to participate. In Illinois the measure of school climate is part of a larger measure of school environment, which is part of each school's and district's state report card. In Massachusetts, each school must assess school climate by conducting a student survey about bullying at least once every four years (also the Massachusetts surveys mentioned below are part of a different law than the Massachusetts law cited in Table 1).

Table 2: Measures and Measurement Methods of School Climate or Environment

State	Required Measures or Measurement Methods
California	Each accountability plan adopted by a board of education must include school climate as measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pupil suspension rates, and • pupil expulsion rates (Cal. Educ. Code § 52066).
District of Columbia	As part of a pilot project, select schools must conduct annual surveys of parents, students, and teachers on the three aspects of school climate: engagement, safety, and environment (DC Code § 38-2602 (b)(27)(E)) (see Table 1). (The pilot project is set to expire after the 2019-2020 school year, but the goal is to extend it to all schools grades 7-12 beginning with the 2020-2021 school year.)
Illinois	Each school's state required report card must include measures of the school environment including, where applicable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the percentage of students with less than 10 absences in a school year; • the percentage of teachers with less than 10 absences in a school year for reasons other than professional development, federal Family Medical Leave Act leave, long-term disability, or parental leave; • the three-year average of the percentage of teachers returning to the school from the previous year; • the number of principals the school has had in the last six years; • two or more indicators from any state-selected or -approved school climate survey, with the same or similar indicators included on school report cards for all surveys selected or approved by the State; and • the combined percentage of teachers rated as proficient or excellent in their most recent evaluation (105 ILCS 5/10-17a).
Massachusetts	As part of the bullying prevention and intervention law, each school district, charter school, approved residential school, and collaborative school must conduct a student survey, at least once every four years, to assess school climate and the prevalence, nature, and severity of bullying in schools. The State Department of Education develops the survey and results are submitted to the department for analysis. The department must make findings available to school officials (M.G.L. 71 § 37O (I)). (Note that this provision is part of a different law than the one addressing safe and supportive schools in Table 1.)

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